

STAFF REPORT

TO: Public Safety Subcommittee **DATE:** June 6, 2006
COPIES TO: City Council **VIA:** Gary Jackson, City Manager
FROM: Chief William Hogan **PREPARED BY:** Capt. Tim Splain
SUBJECT: Traffic Enforcement

SUMMARY STATEMENT: Information pertaining to traffic enforcement initiatives by the Asheville Police Department.

BACKGROUND: The Asheville Police Department has always maintained a commitment to traffic safety and traffic enforcement. This commitment was further enhanced in 1994 with a Governor's Highway Safety Grant which partially funded four full-time traffic safety officers, a traffic safety supervisor, five vehicles, and an assortment of traffic safety and enforcement equipment. Well after the conclusion of this grant (2000), the traffic safety officers were distributed among the five police districts and directly tasked with traffic enforcement directed patrols, major accident investigations, and coordinating traffic enforcement efforts within the police districts.

- Currently, four traffic officers and a newly promoted sergeant (former traffic officer) help the three patrol districts manage traffic related directed patrols, major accident investigations, and traffic enforcement efforts within the districts.
- APD currently has a pool of approximately eight officers that assist with traffic crash reconstruction for fatality motor vehicle accidents and other serious accidents.
- APD responds to more than 7,000 traffic accidents a year within the City limits. This number will continue to grow since the North Carolina State Highway Patrol no longer investigates interstate traffic accidents within the municipal City limits of Asheville. This change in policy by the Highway Patrol created an additional burden on APD of approximately 350 interstate traffic accidents to investigate, many being multiple vehicle or large truck accidents.

CURRENT INITIATIVES: Traffic safety and enforcement issues are generally addressed in the following manner:

- Concerns or complaints are distributed to the police district supervisors and traffic officers for each district.

- The issues are prioritized and a plan of action initiated on each concern. This may be as simple as tasking patrol officers to run radar on a designated street or as complex as collaborating with NC DOT on a strategy to enforce speeding and reduce accidents in a long-term highway construction area.
- Concerns and issues that pose an immediate danger to the motoring public naturally rise to the top of the priority list, but all concerns are addressed as opportunity allows.
- The majority of complaints involve speeding, aggressive driving, and red-light or stop-sign violations.
- Each of the three patrol districts maintains between 10 and 15 traffic enforcement directed patrol areas. The district officers work these problem areas in an effort to diminish traffic offenses and reduce calls for service.
- As much as possible, APD officers use unmanned radar trailers to document traffic speed on individual streets, slowing drivers and calculating vehicle speeds to substantiate or disprove the validity of complaints. These radar trailers provide a written speed study documenting all vehicle speeds and providing a median or 85% percentile speed from passing traffic. This is extremely helpful in neighborhoods where there is a “perception” of a speeding problem but actually very little or no speeding taking place.
- APD officers routinely hold traffic enforcement checkpoints to enforce motor vehicle and DWI violations. Each patrol district creates traffic checkpoint plans in response to traffic related calls for service and accidents.
- District traffic officers and patrol officers regularly consult the City of Asheville Traffic Engineer or NC DOT for assistance in re-engineering problem traffic areas

FUTURE PLANS: APD has recognized the need for a dedicated traffic enforcement team to provide a consistent enforcement effort. This team would also investigate fatality accidents, major collisions, and hit and run accidents, significantly reducing traffic related calls for service for patrol officers. APD has applied for a Governor’s Highway Safety Grant to assist in funding a five person traffic enforcement team. This grant was approved in late 2005 by Asheville City Council but was recently sent back to APD for revision and will be revisited in June, 2006. This grant has a total project cost of \$480,000 with over \$183,000 being funded by the state. Once implemented, this grant will fund a traffic enforcement supervisor, four traffic enforcement officers, five vehicles, radar equipment, a laser crash measuring device, and software for accident reconstruction. In addition to this large grant, APD has been selected for a \$10,000 Mini-Grant from the Governor’s Highway Safety Program to fund traffic checkpoint equipment. This mini-grant will assist in the purchase of a light-tower and generator, checkpoint signs, and reflective cones.

This checkpoint equipment will allow APD officers to safely hold traffic checkpoints after dark.

APD will work to fill these traffic enforcement positions as soon as the patrol division becomes more fully staffed and experienced officers can be moved into the traffic enforcement positions.

Research into Safe-Light cameras and Laser Speed Enforcement devices will continue. A recent Appeals Court decision has determined that fines collected from automated red-light camera violations should be paid to the local school boards. This has hurt municipality's ability to finance these successful programs. APD will continue to monitor how other municipalities with Safe-Light cameras will adapt to this adverse decision before proceeding with any recommendations.